

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF *TAWHĒED*

(ISLAMIC MONOTHEISM)

شرح مبادئ التوحيد

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Publisher's Note

All praise and thanks are due to Allah alone, the One, the All-High and All-Merciful. Blessings and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad, the last of His messengers and prophets, his family, Companions and all those who follow in his footsteps till the end of time.

Tawhid, the oneness of God, is the core of the Islamic faith. Mankind, created as the vicegerent of God, is assigned the duty of implementing this concept on earth in every walk of life since the days of the first man, Adam.

Satan is the eternal and arch enemy of mankind. He vowed that he will spare no effort to distract man from the guided path. He works hard to get man involved in innovations and heresies if paganism or atheism fails to attract attention. Dr. Philips has pointed out the inroads creeping into the creed very efficiently and clarified the concept of *Tawhid* in his book away from deviant views.

Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, a devoted *da'iyah* who graduated from the Islamic University of Madinah, wrote a number of books on Islam in English. In this book he discusses the issue of *Tawhid* in an easy-to-understand language and style. It caters to the needs of all, especially the general readers, and goes a long way towards making the issue wholly understood.

The book, *al-Hamdulillah*, has been well received by readers everywhere. This edition is the revised and improved version by the author.

Chapter One

THE CATEGORIES OF *TAWHĪD*

Literally *Tawhīd* means “unification” (making something one) or “asserting oneness,” and it comes from the Arabic verb *wahhada* which itself means to unite, unify, or consolidate.¹ However, when the term *Tawhīd* is used in reference to Allah (i.e. *Tawhīdullāh*²), it means realizing and maintaining of Allah’s unity in all of man’s actions which directly or indirectly relate to Him. It is the belief that Allah is One, without partner in His dominion (*Rubūbiyah*), One without similitude in His essence and attributes (*Asmā’ waṣ-Ṣifāt*), and One without rival in His divinity and in worship (*Ulūhiyah / ‘Ibādah*). These three aspects form the basis for the categories into which the science of *Tawhīd* has been traditionally divided. The three overlap and are inseparable to

¹ J.M. Cowan, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, (Spoken Language Services Inc., New York, 3rd. ed., 1976), p. 1055.

² The word *tawhīd* does not actually occur in either the Qur’an or in the statements (Hadiths) of the Prophet (ﷺ). However, when the Prophet sent Mu’adh ibn Jabal as governor of Yemen in 9 AH, he told him, “You will be going to Christians and Jews (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), so the first thing you should invite them to is the assertion of the oneness of Allah (*Yuwahhidoo Allah*).” Narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās and collected by Bukhari, Muḥammad Muḥsin Khan, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-Eng.), Riyadh: Maktabah ar-Riyadh al-Hadeetha, 1981, vol. 9, Pp. 348-9, hadith no. 469 and Muslim, Abdul Hamid Siddeeqi, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, (Eng. Trans.), Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1987, vol. 1, Pp. 14-5, hadith no. 27. In this hadith the present tense of the verb from which the verbal noun *Tawhīd* is derived was used by the Prophet (ﷺ).

such a degree that whoever omits any one aspect has failed to complete the requirements of *Tawhīd*. The omission of any of the above mentioned aspects of *Tawhīd* is referred to as *Shirk* (lit. sharing); the association of partners with Allah. In Islamic terms, is in fact idolatry.

The three categories of *Tawhīd* are commonly referred to by the following titles:

1. *Tawhīd ar-Rubūbiyah* (lit. "Maintaining the Unity of Lordship") that is, affirming that Allah is one, without partners in his sovereignty.
2. *Tawhīd al-Asmā' waṣ-Ṣifāt* (lit. "Maintaining the Unity of Allah's Names and Attributes,") that is, affirming that they are incomparable and unique.
3. *Tawhīd al-'Ibādah* (lit. "Maintaining the Unity of Allah's Worship") that is, affirming that Allah is alone in His right to be worshipped.³

The division of *Tawhīd* into its components was not done by the Prophet (ﷺ) nor by his Companions, as there was no necessity to analyze such a basic principle of faith in this fashion. However, the foundations of the components are all implied in the verses of the Qur'an and in the explanatory statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them all), as will become evident to the reader when each category is dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.

The necessity for this analytical approach to the principle of *Tawhīd* arose after Islam spread into Egypt, Byzantium, Persia and India⁴ and absorbed the cultures of these regions. It is only

natural to expect that when the peoples of these lands entered the fold of Islam, they would carry with them some of the remnants of their former beliefs. When some of these new converts began to express in writings and discussions, their various philosophical concepts of God, confusion arose in which the pure and simple unitarian belief of Islam became threatened. There were also others who had outwardly accepted Islam but secretly worked to destroy the religion from within, due to their inability to oppose it militarily. This group began to actively propagate distorted ideas about Allah among the masses in order to tear down the first pillar of *Eemān* (faith) and with it Islam itself.

According to Muslim historians, the first Muslim to express the position of man's free will and the absence of destiny (*qadar*) was in Iraqi convert from Christianity by the name of Sausan. Sausan later reverted to Christianity but not before infecting his student, Ma'bad ibn Khālid al-Juhani from Basrah. Ma'bad spread the teachings of his master until he was caught and executed by the Umayyad Caliph, 'Abdul-Malik ibn Marwān (685-705), in the year 700 CE.⁵ The younger *Ṣaḥābah* who were alive during this period, like 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar (d. 694 CE) and 'Abdullah ibn Abi Awfā (d. 705 CE), advised the people not to greet those who denied destiny nor perform funeral prayers for them when they died. That is, they considered them to be disbelievers.⁶ However, Christian philosophical arguments for free-will continued to find new supporters. Ghailān ibn Muslim from Damascus studied under Ma'bad and championed the cause of free will until he was brought before Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azīz (717-720 CE). He recanted his beliefs publicly; however, on

³ Ibn Abil-'Ezz al-Hanafī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdah at-Ṭahāwīyah*, p. 78.

⁴ South Asia, i.e., presently Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, etc.

⁵ Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb at-Tahdhīb*, (Hyderabad, 1325-7), vol. 10, p. 225.

⁶ 'Abdul-Qāhir ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bain al-Firaq*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah), Pp. 19-20.

Chapter Two

THE CATEGORIES OF *SHIRK*

The study of *Tawhīd* cannot be considered complete without a careful analysis of its opposite, *shirk*. Some mention of *shirk* has already been made in the previous chapter and examples of it have been given to illustrate how *Tawhīd* may be obliterated. However, in this chapter *shirk* will be looked at as a separate topic whose grave importance Allah has attested to in the Qur'an:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ...﴾

(سورة النساء : ٤٨)



"Surely Allah will not forgive the association of partners [shirk] with Him, but He forgives [sins] less than that of whomever He wishes..." (Qur'an 4: 48)

Because the sin of *shirk* denies the very purpose of man's creation, it is to God the gravest of sins, the unforgiveable sin.

Shirk literally means partnership, sharing or associating,¹ but Islamically it refers to the act of assigning partners to Allah in whatever form it may take. The following analysis of *shirk* is according to the three broad categories developed in the study of *Tawhīd*. Hence, we will first look at the main ways in which *shirk* can occur in the area of *Rubūbiyah* (Lordship), then *Asmā' waṣ-*

¹ The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, p. 468.

Ṣifāt (Divine Names and Attributes), and finally in *Tbādah* (worship).

Shirk in Rubūbiyah

This category of *shirk* refers to either the belief that others share Allah's Lordship over creation as His equal or near equal, or to the belief that there exists no Lord over creation at all. Most religious systems fall into the first aspect of *Shirk in Rubūbiyah* while it is the philosophers and their man-made philosophies that tend to fill the second aspect.

1. Shirk by association

Beliefs which fall under this sub-category are ones in which a main God or Supreme Being over creation is recognized, however His dominion is shared by other lesser gods, spirits, mortals, heavenly bodies or earthly objects. Such belief systems are commonly referred to by theologians and philosophers as either monotheistic (having one God) or polytheistic (having more than one God). According to Islam, all of these systems are polytheistic, and many represent various degrees in the degeneration of divinely revealed religious systems all of which were originally based on *Tawhīd*.

Within Hinduism the Supreme Being, *Brahma* is conceived as indwelling, all-pervading, unchangeable and eternal, the abstract, impersonal Absolute, in which all things have their origin and end. While the god *Brahma* is the personified creator of the universe who forms a trinity with the preserver god, *Vishnu* and the destroyer god, *Shiva*.² Thus, *Shirk in Rubūbiyah* is

² W. L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, (New Jersey: =

expressed in Hinduism by the delegation of God's creative, destructive and preservative powers to other gods.

Christian belief states that the one God reveals himself in the three persons of Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and *Holy Spirit*. These three persons are nevertheless regarded as a unity, sharing one 'substance'.³ Prophet Jesus is elevated to divinity, sits on the right hand of God and judges the world. The *Holy Spirit*, who in the Hebrew Bible is the means by which God exercises His creative power, in Christian thought becomes a part of the God-head. Paul made the *Holy Spirit* the alter ego of Christ, the guide and help of Christians, first manifesting itself on the day of Pentecost.⁴ Consequently, *Shirk in Rubūbiyah* occurs in the Christian belief that Jesus and the *Holy Spirit* are God's partners in all of His dominion, in their belief that Jesus alone pronounces judgement on the world, and in their belief that Christians are helped and guided by the *Holy Spirit*.

Zoroastrians (Parsis) conceive of God, *Ahura Mazda*, as being the creator of all that is good, and is alone worthy of absolute worship. Fire is one of the seven creations of *Ahura Mazda* and is considered his son or representative. But they also commit *Shirk in Rubūbiyah* by conceiving of evil, violence and death as being the creation of another god called *Angra Mainyu* whom they represent by the symbol darkness.⁵ Hence, God's sovereignty over all creation (i.e. His *Rubūbiyah*) is shared with an evil spirit elevated to the level of an opposing god due to man's desire to not attribute evil to God.

=Humanities Press, 1980), Pp. 66-7 and 586-7. See also John Hinnells, *Dictionary of Religions* (England: Penguin Books, 1984 Pp. 67-8).

³ *Dictionary of Religions*, p. 337.

⁴ *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p. 231.

⁵ *Dictionary of Religions*, Pp. 361-2.

Born Muslim

Those who are fortunate to be born in Muslim families must be aware that all such "Muslims" are not automatically guaranteed Paradise, because the Prophet (ﷺ) warned that a large part of the Muslim nation would follow the Jews and Christians so closely that if they entered a lizard hole, Muslim would climb in after them.¹² He also said that before the Last Day some Muslims would actually worship idols.¹³ All of these people will have Muslim names and consider themselves Muslims, but it will be of no benefit to them on the Day of Judgement. Today, there are Muslims all around the world praying to the dead, building tombs and *masjids* (mosques) over graves and even performing rites of worship around them. There are even some who claim to be Muslims and worship 'Ali as Allah.¹⁴ Some have turned the Qur'an into a good luck charm which they hang on chains around their necks, in their cars or on key chains, etc. Therefore, those born into such a Muslim world who blindly follow whatever their parents did or believed have to stop and think whether they are simply Muslims by chance or Muslims by choice? Is Islam what their parents, tribe, country, or nation did or does, or is it what the Qur'an teaches and what the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them all) did?

¹² Narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri and collected by Bukhari, (Arabic-Eng.), vol. 9, Pp. 314-5, hadith no. 422 and Muslim, (Eng. Trans.), vol. 1, p. 1403, hadith no. 6448.

¹³ Narrated by Abu Hurayrah and collected by Bukhari, (Arabic-Eng.), vol. 9, p. 178, hadith no. 232 and Muslim, (Eng. Trans.), vol. 4, p. 1506, hadith no. 6944-5.

¹⁴ The *Nuṣayrees* of Syria and the *Druzes* of Palestine and Lebanon.

The Covenant

The covenant which every man made to Allah during pre-creation was that he would recognize Allah, the Almighty, as his Lord and not direct any form of worship to others besides Him. This is the essential meaning of the *shahādah* (declaration of faith) which everyone must make in order to become a full-fledged Muslim; *Lā ilāha illallāh* (There is no god but Allah) also known as *Kalimah at-Tawhīd*, the statement of Allah's Unity. Bearing witness to God's unity in this life is only a confirmation of the primordial declaration made in the spiritual state. But the question which remains is: How is the covenant to be fulfilled?

The covenant is fulfilled by sincerely believing in *Tawhīd* and putting that belief into practice in daily life. *Tawhīd* is put into practice by avoiding all the acts of *shirk* (setting up partners with God) and by closely following the last messenger whom Allah sent as a practical and living example of life based on the principle of *Tawhīd*. Because man has declared that Allah is his Lord, he must then consider righteous deeds to be only those defined by Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ) as being righteous, and evil deeds likewise. In so doing, the principle of *Tawhīd* is put into practice mentally. This method is important because a deed may seem good when it is in fact evil. For example, it has been said that when a poor man wants a king to do something for him, it is better for the poor man to get a prince or someone near to the king to speak on his behalf. Based on that it is further said that if one really wants Allah to answer his prayers, he should pray to the Prophet or a saint to ask Allah on his behalf, since he is dirty with the many sins he commits daily. This may seem logical, but both Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ) have clearly told man to pray directly to Allah without any intermediaries. Allah has said in the Qur'an:

common practice in North America to publish, at the beginning of each year, the various predictions of famous fortunetellers. When a survey was taken of the various predictions for the year 1980, it was found that the most accurate fortuneteller among them was only 24% accurate in her predictions!

2. The second group are those who have made contact with the *Jinn*. This group is of greater importance because it usually involves the grave sin of *shirk*, and those involved often tend to be highly accurate in their information and thus present a real *fitnah* (temptation) for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

World of the Jinn

Some people have attempted to deny the reality of the *Jinn* (sing. *Jinni*) about whom the Qur'an has devoted a whole chapter, *Sūrah al-Jinn*, (72). By relying on the literal meaning of the word *Jinn* which comes from the verb *janna*, *yajunnu*, "to cover, hide or conceal," they claim that the word *Jinn* really refers to "clever foreigners." Others have even stated that a *Jinn* is a human who does not have a true mind in his head but he has a fiery nature. But, the reality is that the *Jinn* represent another creation of Allah which co-exists with man on the earth. Allah created the *Jinn* before He created mankind, and He also used a different set of elements than those used for man. Allah (ﷻ) said:

﴿وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَلٍ مِنْ حَمَلٍ مَسْنُونٍ ۚ وَالْجَانَّ خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ مِنْ نَارِ السَّمُومِ ۝﴾
(سورة الحجر: ٢٦-٢٧)

"Verily we created man from dried clay, from black putrid mud. And we created the *Jinn* before that from a fiery wind."
(Qur'an 15: 26-27)

They were named *Jinn* because they are hidden from the eyes of mankind. *Iblees* (Satan) is from the world of the *Jinn*, even though he was among the angels when they were commanded by Allah to prostrate to Adam. When he refused to do so and was asked why, Allah (ﷻ) said,

﴿قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ ۝﴾
(سورة ص: ٧٦)

"He said, 'I am better than him. You [Allah] created me from fire and You created him from clay!'" (Qur'an 38: 76)

'A'ishah (رضي الله عنها) reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

"The angels were created from light and the *Jinn* from smokeless fire."¹

Allah (ﷻ) also said:

﴿وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ ۝﴾
(سورة الكهف: ٥٠) ...

"And when We told the angels to prostrate to Adam, they all prostrated except *Iblees*. He was of the *Jinn*..."

(Qur'an 18: 50)

Therefore it is incorrect to consider him a fallen angel or the like.

The *Jinn* may first be divided into three broad categories according to their modes of existence. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

"There are three types of *Jinn*: One type which flies in the air all the time, another type which exists as snakes and dogs, and an earthbound type which resides in one place

¹ Collected by Muslim, (Eng. Trans.), vol. 4, p. 1540, hadith no. 7134.

early man's superstitions based on his lack of scientific knowledge. They believe that science will eventually be able to unlock all of the secrets of nature, at which time, it is assumed, religion will disappear.

The degeneration model of religion

The Islamic concept of religion and its development is exactly the opposite of the previous view. It is one of a process of degeneration and regeneration and not one of evolution. Man began as a monotheist, but in time strayed into various forms of polytheism. Sometimes it was ditheism, sometimes it was tritheism and sometimes it was pantheism. Prophets were sent by God to all the nations and tribes of the earth to guide them back to the straight path of monotheism. But with the passage of time, people went astray and the teachings of the prophets were either changed or lost. The proof of this reality lies in the fact that all the so called primitive tribes which have been found have the belief in a Supreme Being. No matter what their stage of religious development may have been according to the evolutionary theory, most believe in a Supreme God over all the other gods or spirits. From *Itzmna*, the creator-god of the Central-American Mayans¹⁶ to *Ngewo*, creator of the universe and spirits of the Sierra Leone Mende,¹⁷ and from Hinduism's *Brahma*, the impersonal Absolute,¹⁸ to *Marduk*, the ancient city deity of Babylon and Supreme God of the pantheon,¹⁹ the Supreme Being can be clearly seen. Even in the ditheism of the Zoroastrians, *Ahura Mazda*, the God of good, is greater than *Angra Manyu*. And the

¹⁶ *Dictionary of Religions*, p. 93.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

day of judgement, according to their beliefs, is the day when *Ahura Mazda* defeats *Angra Manyu*! So *Ahura Mazda* is really their supreme God.²⁰

According to the evolutionary model, this should not be the case, as the belief in One Supreme God supposedly grew out of limited polytheism and could not co-exist with animism. However, the concept of a single Supreme Being remains in most religions as evidence that the masses strayed away from the monotheistic teachings of the prophets by giving some of God's attributes to other aspects of creation, which came to be regarded as lesser gods in some cases and as intercessors in others.

Another proof of the correctness of the degeneration model can be found in the historical transition of monotheistic Judaism into polytheistic Christianity. Monotheism taught by Prophet Jesus first degenerated into ditheism according to those who held that Jesus was not God the father, but a created divine son. This was also the case among Greeks who identified Jesus as the *Logos*, found in the philosophies of Anaxagoras through to Aristotle.²¹ Later it further degenerated into tritheism among the Romans who officially sanctioned the trinitarian concept.²² Finally, it degenerated into full-fledged polytheism in the Roman Catholic Church, where Mary and a series of so-called saints were given the powers of intercession and protection.

²⁰ *Dictionary of Religions*, p. 28.

²¹ According to these philosophers, *Nous* was the immaterial motivating principle of the universe while *Logos* was its material manifestation - (*Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p. 314).

²² The finally acceptable trinitarian formula, as worked out by the Cappadocians and approved by the Roman council of Constantinople in 381, held that God is one Being, existing externally in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (*Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p. 586).